

MEDIA RELEASE

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Minerva Community Services and Barwon CASA intention to merge

“Family Violence – combined expertise leads the way to prevention”

Two of Geelong’s highly regarded specialist family violence services have announced today that they intend to merge to create a strong and robust platform to prevent and respond to the high levels of sexual assault and family violence in our community.

The partnership of Minerva Community Services and Barwon Centre Against Sexual Assault builds on many years of specialist expertise and will enable the new service to transform the response to sexual assault and family violence in the Barwon and Wimmera regions.

Chief Executive Officer, Helen Bolton advised “It is timely to bring our two services together. Women and children experiencing family violence will receive a comprehensive service that can respond to their immediate safety needs; the new service is able to address the effects of the trauma they have experienced and support them towards recovery”.

As noted by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, there is a high co-existence of family violence and sexual assault and the successful implementation of their recommendations ‘*will require new ways of thinking and collaboration*’. In bringing our two organisations together, we are creating a single entry point and highly efficient model to meet the needs of people in our community who are experiencing sexual assault and family violence.

According to Renee Fiolet, Chair of the Minerva Board “We think it’s about revolutionising the way the service system works. Our intention to merge is a first step on the way to seeing real change to the way services are delivered; it will make it much easier for women and children to have a coordinated response”.

Informed by best practice and evidence-based models, Barwon CASA and Minerva have been at the forefront of innovative responses in recent years. Minerva has led the way in working with Victoria Police in responding to women experiencing family violence and also provides access to accommodation. Minerva’s services also include support to women attending court, and they deliver a project working with Culturally Linguistically Diverse Communities.

Barwon CASA has a strong history in providing therapeutic support to people who have experienced sexual assault and family violence and is a partner in the Barwon Multidisciplinary Centre, (Barwon MDC) one of only six such centres in Victoria. Multidisciplinary Centres have been shown to deliver better coordination of services, more timely responses and positive outcomes for children, young people and adults who have experienced sexual assault.

Dr Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Chairperson of the Barwon CASA Board stated “Bringing our two services together, combines our expertise, specialist knowledge and skills and enables ‘single area entry points’ that will help to streamline and eliminate any confusion currently experienced by victims of family and sexual violence and service providers who refer into our services.

It is a highly collaborative model which co-locates the Barwon CASA specialist sexual assault counsellors with specialist police and child protection staff in the one building.

Helen Bolton reflects that in the years since Barwon CASA joined the MDC in 2012, *“We have seen the difference co-location and collaboration of specialist services makes for people who come forward to seek assistance in the face of such traumatic experiences; it is much easier for victims to find help and to get the right assistance”*.

Creating a single entry point

Barwon CASA and Minerva’s intention to merge will further add to the MDC model and bring more specialist staff together to create a single entry point that provides support and a holistic service, all in one location.

The commission heard that siloing of family violence and sexual assault services can lead to victims having to tell their stories multiple times, creates confusion for victims, who often have need of services from both organisations, and also causes confusion for referral agencies. By intending to merge, our new organisation will break down these silos and work collaboratively to achieve the best outcome for our clients.

Helen Bolton said “We have strong and genuine partnerships with local services and look forward to building on the opportunities available to address sexual assault and family violence. We are driven by our commitment to ensure that all women and children in our community can live a life free from violence and abuse”.



L-R: Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Chairperson, Barwon CASA Board; Helen Bolton, CEO Barwon CASA; Renee Fiolet, Chairperson, Minerva Board

Photograph by Mary Thompson

Contacts

Helen Bolton
CEO, Barwon CASA
(03) 5222 4318 / 0401 281 912 / helenbolton@barwoncasa.org

For photographs and other information:

Louise Tracey
Communications Officer
Barwon CASA
(03) 5222 4318 / louise@barwoncasa.org